

An Historical Sermon
of
St. Philip's Church

Philadelphia, Pa.

by the

Rev. Clarence Wyatt Bispham

Rector of the Church, 1900-1916

May 6, 1916

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*Except the Lord build the house, they labour
in vain that build it.—PSALM 127: 2.*

ST. PHILIP'S has rounded out its history of some seventy-five years. A church of our Faith has always settled purposes for its erection and work, *i. e.*, to extol the Glory of God and promote the salvation of souls. It is a damnable sin—one of the seven deadly sins—this sin of pride. There is, however, an extenuating circumstance—we are permitted pride when we talk of work done for God and His Kingdom.

And we are permitted to feel pride, and a just pride, for one result, that St. Philip's has accomplished.

During these seventy-five years, thirty-five men have received Holy Orders, who have been members of this Parish!

I do not know of any Parish in the Diocese of Pennsylvania that has equalled or exceeded this record. And we point to this circumstance alone as a sufficient justification for our existence! But I anticipate.

On October 13, 1840, a number of Philadelphia's earnest citizens were gathered in the Vestry-room of Old Grace Church, to plan for the erection of a church building at Franklin and

Vine Streets. Three days later, the corner-stone was laid by Bishop Onderdunk. I have seen a copy of the service used on that occasion.

A year later the Church was consecrated, and the Bishop in his Convention Address speaks of it as follows:

"It is a large and elegant structure, highly creditable to the Christian zeal and energy of the band of Churchmen who contributed of their substance and their time to its erection."

I have never seen a picture of the old St. Philip's, but its first Rector, the Rev. Edward Neville, in his report to the Convention, places its seating capacity on the floor and gallery at about 1,200—almost three times as large as the present building. Underneath, on the ground floor, was the space allotted to the Schools of the Parish. I say schools, because they were three in number—one for men and boys, with a male superintendent; one for women and girls, with a female superintendent, and a school for the little folk.

On a minute of the Vestry Record we read that "the Bible shall be the basis of all instruction."

The Church was situated in the resident section of the city, and in his accepting the call, Dr. Neville says: "An opportunity of exclusive

usefulness is here offered to a laborious and faithful ministry of the Gospel rarely equalled."

His Wardens during those first years were William H. Newbold and Joseph H. Burnett.

A choir of men and women furnished the vocal music for \$150 per year. The sexton's salary was \$200. St. Philip's began its great work for the ministry in the person of Daniel S. Miller, the first candidate for Holy Orders. In those days it was the custom not only to rent pews, but to buy and sell them. In 1847, two new furnaces were built, and Pew 350 was given to the furnace maker, as part payment for the debt. Another record tells us that Joel Rudderow was a second candidate for Holy Orders.

In the Parish Library of the Sunday School were 603 books.

In September, 1849, Dr. Neville resigned, to go to Christ Church, New Orleans. He had been eight years Rector, and the Church had greatly prospered. But its banner period was under the Rectorship of the Rev. Charles D. Cooper, whose picture hangs in our Vestry Room, 1850-1868. The Church was crowded, and a resolution, in 1859, tells us that "Hereafter, upon no occasion shall chairs or benches be permitted to be placed in the aisles of the Church."

Marshall B. Smith and Reese F. Allsop were candidates for Orders. Indeed, in the eighteen years of Dr. Cooper's Rectorship, eighteen men from St. Philip's took Orders. It is of interest for your Rector to note that in 1859, James Lippincott Bispham, head of a large business at Sixth and Market Streets, was elected Vestryman of St. Philip's, and served on the Sunday School Committee. And, please note that John D. Zebley, uncle of the present Warden, was then a Vestryman. It is also of interest for you to know where Dr. Cooper found eighty-one adults to be baptized in one year? And the answer is that the bulk of them came from the Society of Friends.

Philadelphians do not need to be told anything of these pious and godly men and women, who really made the beginnings of this city.

It is sufficient to state that no man has ever before or since in our own ministry had such a tremendous influence upon the Friends, or has brought so many of them to the Sacramental System that Jesus Christ Himself instituted. I mention this to show the admirable characteristics of the congregation. Without any doubt at all, a very great work was done for the Glory of God and the salvation of souls. St. Philip's was justly known as "the Quaker trap."

Glancing over the minute and severely detailed financial reports of this time, we find several of the best-known Philadelphia names, given with their respective amounts, opposite, to clear off a trifling deficit of some \$300. Here are Thomas Newbold, Thomas Page, B. Hinchliff, William Lippincott, Mary Willits, Joseph C. Coppeck, etc.

In 1862, Reese F. Allsop, the Assistant Minister, resigned to go to Brooklyn, and in a letter to the Vestry says: "I shall ever look back to the years spent at St. Philip's with feelings of the deepest satisfaction and gratitude."

And in reply, the Vestry speaks of "The acceptable and devout Gospel instruction given us from the pulpit and the desk, which have greatly endeared him to us."

In 1868, the Rev. Charles D. Cooper finished one of the most remarkable pastorates ever held in the city of Philadelphia, and became, at the instance of George C. Thomas, Rector of the Church of the Holy Apostles. These eighteen years represent the high water mark of the Church, spiritually and financially. Twelve thousand dollars indebtedness was paid off, hundreds were Confirmed; and the Church was making a lasting impression upon the neighborhood, and indeed upon the whole city, when a change

came that resulted in a great disaster. Let me hasten to add that this disaster was not within, but *without*, the Church.

To be brief, the residence section became a business section, and all the old families moved away, leaving this great Church, with a handful of people, as compared to the throngs that used to gather there in the earlier days.

This change is common to all American cities, and it takes an almost Divine prescience to build a Church building in such a strategic position as will always endure. With us all things seem to be *temporal*. To quote again from Dr. Allsop: "In 1874, when the Rev. W. F. C. Morsell took charge, it was a foregone conclusion that the Church must either follow its parishioners toward the northwest, or become a mission.

And so, in 1879, St. Philip's took the old building of the Church of the Advocate, and unwittingly connected itself with a chronic failure. This was at Spring Garden Street, below Broad. It came into a neighborhood where there was no call for it, and lived for a few years a sort of dying life. The years of the Spring Garden episode, from 1879 to 1889, had best be passed over in silence, for they represent little else but sorrow and failure. During that time, however, two men were prominent in the affairs of the Church

—Major Veale and Townsend Willits. But the double burden of debt and a poor situation was too much, even in spite of the most heroic efforts, and after the death of the Rev. Mr. Kilikelly, the Church on Spring Garden Street closed its doors.

It is a vast pity that in those early days we had no guiding and compelling hand to say just where these parishes should have located.

Practically they were allowed to locate according to their own sweet wills, and the result is waste of money, time, and men, and a disrupting of association and breaking of hearts.

Where the second church building used to stand is now the Lu Lu Temple; where the first church building stood is now a large warehouse! Those things are wrong, and make us very sad. It is to be hoped that the time will come when the Bishop, and the Bishop alone, shall have power vested in him to decide just where Parishes shall be located. In this respect, the Roman Church sets us an admirable example.

But, meanwhile, in West Philadelphia, a work was started in 1850, near the corner of Forty-second and Regent Streets. A Miss Allibone opened a Sunday School in a house at the corner of Forty-second and Regent Streets. The workers in that school organized a Parish, and in 1853, Trinity Church, Maylandville, was con-

separated, and under the Rectorships of several men grew and prospered.

Here we note the names of L. Harry Richards and John M. Walton. They found the old frame building not large enough to meet the demands of the congregation, and in 1879, they began the building in which we now worship, by the erection of the nave (two-thirds as wide as the one in which we now worship), and the south transept. The Parish House, consisting of one floor and the tower, was built in 1884. Bishop Stevens, the Consecrator, looked at the gentlemen who were instrumental in building this Church with keen astonishment and almost a good-natured scorn. All around the Church were green fields and Forty-second Street was little better than a cow-path. His faith and his vision could not dream of a flourishing West Philadelphia, with its Churches and its people. And in 1886, came the building of the north transept, the baptistry, (now used as the organ chamber), and the Vestry-room, thus connecting the Church and the Parish House. This all was done while the Church was still called Trinity, Maylandville. Meanwhile, the old St. Philip's was declining rapidly.

In December, 1886, an offer of \$32,500 was made and declined for the property. Townsend

Willits at this time was Rector's Warden, and his wise counsel and sound judgment were of incalculable aid to this perplexed Parish, torn and distressed on all sides. At this junction, the Rev. the Rector fell ill and passed into Paradise on October 22, 1887.

A note of the Vestry in February, 1888, tells us that the Music Committee have engaged four persons to sing at a total salary of \$500 a year. But the finances were steadily becoming less and less, and in July, the Wardens were authorized to close the Church until further notice.

In February, 1889, a proposal came from St. Mark's Church, to have St. Philip's start again as a mission, which was finally refused, Bishop Whitaker not having given his "cordial approval". At last, on February 19, 1890, the Church building at Broad and Spring Garden was sold for the sum of \$36,000 cash, and the Wardens were instructed to purchase from Trinity, Maylandville, to pay off all indebtedness, and to use the rest of the money for an endowment fund.

The name of the secretary of this meeting was William F. Read. Allen Childs, Charles Esté, and L. Harry Richards were the committee from the Vestry of Trinity, to transfer the property to St. Philip's Church. So, although this

third Church building was begun in 1879, it did not become St. Philip's until 1890, when it was consecrated.

Thus did Townsend Willits and William F. Read successfully renew the good name of this St. Philip's Church at a time when, owing to its position geographically, discredit and embarrassment threatened to overwhelm it. One of the first acts of the new Vestry, composed of members of old St. Philip's and Trinity, was to pay an old debt of \$971.00 for an organ; a debt of thirty years' standing. And in the acknowledgment, the Vestry is thanked "for the example of honesty and Christian integrity".

In 1890, they had a continuous experimenting in the matter of music, and we note that Mr. W. W. Gilchrist, the eminent musician, had charge of the choir.

It is highly important to speak of the noble and valuable service rendered the Church by the Rev. Richard N. Thomas. Without his inspiration and noble service, the Church never would have flourished during those twelve years, 1879-1891. Yet all was going well, and especially the Sunday School, not so much in numbers as in loving devotion and careful teaching. All this strength was necessary, for illness came to Mr. Thomas at the very time when the Church

could have enjoyed the result of his careful work, had he been in the enjoyment of good health.

On March 10, 1891, we note the election of Major Moses Veale to the Vestry.

During the vacancy occasioned by Mr. Thomas' resignation, the Rev. Prof. James conducted the services, to the great satisfaction of the congregation. Among the communicants was a young man, George Bartlett, now Dean of the Philadelphia Divinity School.

As an indication of the earnest efforts of the Vestry to find a Rector, the records show the nomination of at least twelve gentlemen, some of them very highly approved in the Church, and holding highly responsible positions.

A boys' choir, under the leadership of Mr. Squires, was installed, and a note tells us that the Ladies' Aid Society were thanked for "their cordial assistance and co-operation in the matter of the Vested Choir."

This date, October, 1891, marks the withdrawal of the quartette, and the bringing of the Choir into the Chancel of the Church. It is pleasant to know that at the request of the late Mr. Innis, the Parish buildings were loaned to the Home of the Merciful Saviour for a Fair.

The Rev. Mr. Doggett was called, and remained as Rector for four years.

In 1895, the Rev. William Howard Falkner was elected Rector, and under his wise direction, the Church took on renewed prosperity. The Woman's Auxiliary began to do the helpful and wise work that distinguished it for so many years. The attendance in the Sunday School began to increase. The music of the Choir, under the leadership of Percy A. Legge, was pronounced excellent. The Chancel window was renovated. This loving and tender picture of the Head of Christ was given to the Church by the children of the Sunday School, in the time of the Rev. Richard Thomas. The Ladies' Aid is again making itself felt, for we see a donation of \$236.00 to the Vestry.

Among the names of Vestrymen elected in April, 1896, are F. Bowman Price, J. Warner Goheen, William G. Tyler, Francis C. Dade, and George Kirkpatrick. At this time, the income of the Church amounted to \$4,500. F. B. Price began his faithful secretaryship of the Vestry, and L. Harry Richards still remained Rector's Warden, an office which he honorably filled for many years. Looking over those names from many of Philadelphia's best families, we

justly conclude that the Vestry was a very strong one.

In 1897, the name of J. Harry Loomis was added to this list. In October, 1899, the Rector spoke of the advisability of the Church entering upon some definite work for the future, and a committee was formed to consider how best to celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the Parish. Thus began the first of a series of improvements in the Church and Parish Buildings, which are known to the majority here.

On June 3, 1900, the present Rector took charge of the Parish, and was instituted by Bishop Whitaker, in December of the same year.

This is no place to speak of his work. Indeed, others can better judge than he of what value he has been to the Parish. He has been greatly aided by many faithful workers. In the fall of 1903, and with, at the first, a membership from St. Philip's, was the Fellowship Club, now justly celebrated for its admirable music, begun in our Parish House. Mr. W. B. Kessler has always been its conductor.

Those in charge of the different Societies have been especially faithful.

In view of the wonderful report received last Thursday from the chairman of the Finance

Committee, we can go to work with renewed zeal and energy.

In closing, let me quote the words spoken by Dr. Allsop at his sermon here in 1890, at the Consecration of the Church:

"May St. Philip's Church be prospered here as she was in her best days in the old locality. To as many, aye, to more souls than ever, may she be none other than the house of God and the gate of heaven. Long may her courts be thronged—glad be her songs, rich be her harvests, and blessed of God be all her work.

"'Peace be within thy walls and prosperity within thy palaces. For my brethren and companions' sake, I will now say, peace be within thee.'"

Amen.